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departure

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Editors:
ALAN BROWNJOHN : BERNARD DONOUGHUE

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ONE SHILLING

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DEPARTURE

VOLUME THREE NUMBER SEVEN

AND THEN THERE WERE NONE?

THE DEMAND for higher critical standards that is frequently made by writers in the more austere and scholarly of the literary journals is wholly justified. Their attitude, however, rests upon what would appear to be a somewhat optimistic presupposition: that there still remains a public large enough and sufficiently well-informed for the writing and appreciation of such criticism to continue to be a practical matter. It is not always easy to accept this assumption now, and this is clearly recognised by some of the wiser critics. (One thinks of the excellent article by J. W. Saunders on 'Poetry in the Managerial Age,' in a recent number of *Essays in Criticism*.) But too many others still regard judicious and informed criticism as an activity of value without giving much thought to the strength of the social forces which, year by year, are cutting away the appreciation of good writing at its roots.

What we are complaining about, in general, is the complacent, or ignorant belief in a large, interested public which no longer exists. This is partly an attitude bred in acknowledged cultural centres: writers and editors who live close to each other in London, or Oxford, or Cambridge derive an encouragement from this proximity which blinds them to the absence of a sizeable public anywhere else. The decline in the reading and appreciation of poetry should have warned them by now that their small audience is diminishing rapidly, whittled away perhaps by those arts whose superficial enjoyment calls for less effort and intelligence — music, the ballet, the film. But in addition to this, the media of mass communication (to which will soon be added the antics of the ITA) are becoming ever more effective in stemming the flow of new recruits into the dwindling ranks of those who can appreciate and criticise the arts. And yet there is scarcely more than an impotent and impractical awareness of this situation.

How can it be improved? What is needed is not the laudable but useless concern which usually characterises the utterances of writers on this question, but some practical suggestions — for some spade-work that will do something to re-establish the reading of new literature among the activities of all those who pretend to a certain culture and sensibility.

Our own feeling is that this will have to be a gradual process, education rather than conversion. We have privately canvassed the opinion that no school library, for example, should be without the major works of modern literature and the two leading literary maga-

zines of the moment. Often, this would depend on the generosity of former pupils, and we are secretly hopeful of stirring a small number of consciences by this suggestion. In any case, we should like to ask our readers to communicate their views on other, *severely practical,* ways of breaking this deadening *impasse* in literary affairs.

ANTHONY THWAITE

The Dream

The cold before the dawn had woken me
Out of a sleep, but not quite waking yet ;
The cold nudged at the window silently
And turned your face and presence back to me.
At four o'clock our two ghosts, yawning, met.

Somewhere between the mirror and the bed
You saw me, hung with disembodied sleep.
At once occurring to me you were dead,
I rinsed my eyes with both my fists and said,
' It seems appropriate we should not weep.

Bored with the stupefaction of the heart,
Twiddling our fingers in the usual game,
Now, as before, we lame love at the start
And find seduction a corrupting art,
Since all its permutations mean the same.'

Such talk seemed right, if glib, for one who shared
A six-month dissolution from the throne
Of Venus, or a bed. I had not spared
Myself in such a censure, was prepared
For good advice where I could not disown.

Only her dark remembered face appeared
Behind the dark robes she was hooded in,
And as she spoke I knew what I had feared
Lay in her throat and heart : my smooth words jeered
From the cold bed which was their origin.

SHE ' I find you still uncertain and afraid,
Making mosaics of philosophy,
Addressing with half-elegance a spade
By any other name. What you betrayed
You still betray : I mean your honesty.

New inspiration from an old mistake
May bolster up ten stanzas for a time
But never can resolve the harsher ache
Which comes from rags and chains you cannot break
And words you may not sever with a rhyme.

You see me as a well of memory
From which you draw the irrigating flood
To nourish elegies: you brood on me,
Narcissus in a former ecstasy,
Mirrored in water before seen in blood.

This is your art and this your artifice
With which you weave a garland round a theme;
But you had hoped for something more than this
Insulting dalliance with a lecher's kiss:
Beyond the poet is the poet's dream.

See me as something more than something lost
Within entrancing errors, to be shaped
Into a jewel at the crude ore's cost.
Among our stars the strict conjunction crossed
Which would not let my love be snared and raped.

In the intrinsic moment when we loved,
The Muses in their subterfuge agreed
That nothing from that moment could be moved.
Absolve me if you can, but they approved
The paradox on which your sick words feed.'

She left me as the window showed the light
Against the mirror on the fading wall.
The coming day had wavered into sight
Against her vacant image: but the night
Had let my ready phrases wilt and fall.

The cynic's snigger and the poet's sly
Flirtation with the things he might have said
Left me with nothing left to say but 'why?'
I knew, with her, that sleeping dogs must die,
And faced the new and empty day instead.

LAWRENCE SPINGARN

Merlin and Nimiane

(A paraphrase from the Cymric)

When Merlin came to the ford, and saw how the waters played
And flashed in the pool blocked by trees torn from the wood,
He knew he could cross to his love in the aspen shade
On the rope of his own black evil that balanced her good.
So he crossed by his spell, and cut a staff from thorn,
And looked for the print of her foot, the spoor of her breath
In the long purple bulk of the mountain where mist was born
As the woman he sought fled from the traffic of death.
And Nimiane watched his approach from the tender glade
As the frocks of the morning clothed less arrogant shapes.
Mortality failed. The sandals of fear were not made
To carry her safely over the shoal of escapes.
Dire Merlin passed in the hood of his own jet glance.
The sun was stricken, and drooped in the nets of the day.
And Nimiane felt the prick of the secret lance
That spurns all comfort, and drives most desires away.
She sped to the pool where the water turned in its grave.
The rope of evil hung stark from an aspen limb.
Her neck was as smooth as the stone philosophers crave.
Her mind, bright mirror of Merlin, went dark longing for him.

PHILIP LARKIN

Always too eager for the future, we
Pick up bad habits of expectancy.
Something is always approaching ; every day
Till then we say,

Watching from a bluff the tiny, clear,
Sparkling armada of promises draw near.
How slow they are! And how much time they waste,
Refusing to make haste!

Yet still they leave us holding wretched stalks
Of disappointment, for, though nothing balks
Each big approach, leaning with brasswork prinked,
Each rope distinct,

Flagged, and the figurehead with golden tits
Arching our way, it never anchors ; it's
No sooner present than it turns to past.
Right to the last

We think each one will heave to and unload
All good into our lives, all we are owed
For waiting so devoutly and so long.
But we are wrong :

Only one ship is seeking us, a black-
Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back
A huge and birdless silence. In her wake
No waters breed or break.

ANTHONY BAILEY

Pastoral

Among these hills the madman hires no home :
a clouded summit beckons to the sane
who grant no moving right to those who roam

or dwell outside of mountains. Here, disdain
is that of men who see and understand
the slow, processional figures of the rain

marching down valleys ; who conceive this land
as personal, putting down roots in earth.
Perhaps a child's world in its closeness, and

paternal in peculiar ways of mirth :
just hints for laughter and more often stern.
Yet there is something longer here than dearth,

where the glare of man is silenced, his burn
bandaged in far walks of cloud — here is grass,
a quivering, shaking stream, and time to learn.

And time is what they make it having eyes
that witness closely rocks and hills ; a day
when picking heather, man, without surprise,

gathers the bright reality of grey.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

by Jenny Joseph

'EV'NIN Bill, ev'nin Les. Hallo Slater, haven't seen you for a long time, where've you been hiding?'

The big man who pushed his way through a crowd of young strangers towards the skittle table made the group there up to six. The other men were trying to ignore the feeling of restraint caused by the quiet young men and women at the other end of the bar. In summer when there was a camp at Breck's farm the pub was never quite the comfortable place it ought to have been. This particular evening the students seemed more silent than ever, chiefly because there had been a well-meaning suggestion that they should have a party before they separated back to their homes — to town activities, or a quiet family life in another countryside. Some sat watching the ball as it swung among the skittles, pretending to be absorbed, some made an effort at conversation. The party was finally doomed when someone used his last gesture of initiative to troop them into the saloon at the back. There were too many women for the men to enjoy dirty jokes, the men were too dull to respond to the girls' attempts at showing interest. The ones who had anything to say to each other were presumably taking advantage of the empty camp. The men round the skittles collected more beer and settled to the game.

'Robert, have you seen Tim?' a small man, older than the others, asked the man who had recently joined them.

'When? This evening you mean?'

'Well, just any time. The last three evenings he hasn't been in at all. Tim hasn't been in has he Bob?' he asked the landlord.

'Last time I saw him he was at his runner beans. There seemed something up the way he was doing them, going at it fiercely without even a nod to me, so I didn't like to ask what the trouble was.'

'Oh, he's a moody chap.' Slater, a man who from a distance looked young, but showed a slightly sagging face closer to, felt that attention was being shifted from the game. He kept the score marked with chalk on the edge of the table.

It was a windy night and a soldier on his way back to Worcester came in, drank off a glass and, with an envious look at the men slowly sipping their way through the evening, went off again. A shy couple very much in love but very decorous settled in a corner and watched the skittles without seeing or hearing the men. The ball swung among the wooden pins knocking them with a regular beat — for men who swing a ball among skittles night after night must be skilled in it — and the girl listened to it hitting away the alternatives: I love you, I love you not. And then: This year, next year, sometime, never.

'A penny,' the young man said and she followed the beat out loud and it stopped on 'I love you not' and then 'Next year.' Such negatives being irrelevant, however, failed to penetrate and could not change sound into meaning.

A short square man with a heavy head of hair slipped without notice round the door, slid up to the end of the bar nearest the entrance and looked along it to the men at the skittles. He seemed to need the support of the bar to take his eye-beam along to them. Bob placed his glass in front of him but he said in a low voice 'Whiskey, Bob.' This request, however low, could not but be heard in the room.

'Tim, where've you been?' Robert, the tall man, came across and gave him a joyful slap on the shoulder that sent him huddled against the bar. 'Is the wife ill?'

'No, no, she's pretty well, thank you.'

'Coming to play?'

'Where's your glass, Robert?' The men were relieved to hear Tim make this worn crack at Robert's capacity and for a bit he joined in, joking more than usual perhaps. Bill, the older man, said he had to be off and Slater tried to cajole him to stay. He knew that once one of them started to move the rest would gradually dwindle. He lived with his brother's family and didn't want to go back there one minute before it was necessary to abandon all alternatives. Bill did go, however, and Tim gradually dropped back into silence. It was Robert who asked what the matter was just as he was about to go out muttering 'Good night,' and while their voices became more vehement, Tim protesting that there was nothing the matter and Robert insisting on knowing, the others joined in until Tim gave up.

'All right,' he said, and paused. They returned to their places and Bob shoved some beer towards Tim. 'It's my grandfather,' he said. He seemed to consider that that was all that was necessary to satisfy their curiosities.

Tim's grandfather was known as a kind old man with lots of white hair, seen usually on summer evenings sitting in a little shed smoking while Tim did the garden. Every now and then Tim would pick up one of the magazines that had slipped off the old man's knee when he dozed off. He had only recently come to live in the village, about two or three years ago, after his daughter, Tim's mother, had died. As he was an old man, though still active for his age, he was known by repute rather than personally. Tim was well-liked and the men were very sorry to hear that something had happened to the grandfather. Tim recognised in their downcast looks of sympathy that uncomfortable reaction on hearing of someone's death, so he hastened to assure them that nothing of that sort had happened.

Relief prompted Robert's insistence: 'What is it then?'

'Well, he . . . well, I'd have to explain grandfather a bit before

you could see it.' The men with the exception of Slater were quite glad to leave the skittles and he had the sense, based on frequent experiences, to join the bunch as soon as it formed.

'My grandfather,' continued Tim, with the easy pace of one who is sure of his audience, 'has always been an active and busy man. By trade he was a carpenter, not as you know, from Worcestershire, but from the North, but he turned his hand to anything that came along. He was an active man but he had only been once out of the village he was born in. That was when he went on a holiday after his wedding. It lasted for one day because in those days he was the only one in the village to make a coffin and the night after his wedding the town clerk died, so grandfather came back to make one for him. I don't think he became particularly interested in travelling until grandmother died, that's about five years ago now.'

Although the men in the Wheatsheaf hadn't spoken much to Tim's grandfather yet they usually knew when anyone in the village went away, and no one remembered the absence of the old man.

'When did he go away? Where's he been to?' Slater asked.

'Ah,' Tim replied as if expecting the question, 'That's the point you see, he never did go.'

'But you said he was interested in travelling.' Slater could never wait as Robert, impulsive though he was, could do, for an explanation to emerge.

'I said he was interested in travelling, I never said he'd travelled. In fact, as I mentioned, that's the point. Five years ago, grandfather decided that he must keep himself occupied. He had no intention of being a drag and he's been the one person you could be sure of getting a smile out of. That's what's so terrible. The difference. He's completely changed.' Tim became gloomy and seemed to forget the story he was telling.

'But what happened?'

'Well, as I was saying, grandfather occupied himself, and he started to read about places abroad. Pictures, cards, magazines, anything describing somewhere foreign interested him, but the place he really got enthusiastic about was Sark.'

'Where's Sark?' asked Robert.

'Sark,' said Tim, 'is an island six miles E.S.E. of Guernsey. It's about three miles long and half as wide and it's . . .

'All right, all right, you don't have to give us a geography lesson.'

'You see, I've got used to hearing it. I've picked up a certain amount from grandfather. He knows all about it. He's read up the history and the customs. He's got little guide books and maps and books with photographs, and great thick books in small print. He even started to learn French because, he said, there were some good books on Sark written in French, and then he had plans to learn *their*

lingo. But of course all that's finished now, and even in such a short time his books and magazines have got all in a mess. He used to like them tidied every Sunday.'

'But what was all this for?' Slater would have been scornful had he not been so puzzled.

'Oh, it had a reason all right. Of course he liked the reading and never could concentrate on anything when a new book came. You'd be telling him something and he'd make an excuse to do some job and you'd find him rather guiltily looking at it. He never quite got used to feeling it was right to read in the morning. But grandfather was always a practical man and all the reading didn't excite him nearly as much as his plans for going there. From pictures I've seen I'd say it really was the loveliest place, if you like that sort of thing.

'Dirty noisy stations don't appeal to lots of people, least of all old people, but grandfather loved the idea of the train, and then the boat, and then landing at Sark into another world. He got maps and time-tables and thought of different routes back. There'd be a donkey cart, he said, to take him to the place he would stay at. No traffic's allowed on Sark, you see. Once a big pot went on an official visit there and looked for the usual car and refused to ride a donkey up to the town, but the Dame doesn't allow any traffic, so he had to walk, which was a mighty long way.'

'Who?'

'Who "who"?'

'Who's the Dame?'

'She's the ruler. I think grandfather liked the idea of Sark so much because he thought things there would be rather like when he was young.'

'When's he going then?'

'Oh, he'll never go now. You see, six weeks ago his second son, my uncle, not my father — he was the eldest — had a bad accident and was taken to hospital. He got better but they thought he was going to die so grandfather went to see him. He lives in Ireland and you have to go by train and then across the water. Just like Sark.

'I don't know what happened on that journey. I don't suppose it was particularly bad, but grandfather hadn't ever faced the sea before. I dare say he thought it would feel as beautiful as his photographs looked, and then staying in a strange place where no one would know how he likes things, and he couldn't understand them when they spoke. I should have gone with him, but it would have been the same in the end. If only he could have gone on thinking about going somewhere . . .'

Tim decided he had already said too much.

'Well, I must push off — it's a strain on the wife sitting alone with him now. I must be getting back.'

Tim lingered at the door and said to Bob quietly, surreptitiously getting the last bit of comfort from the company of men before he went back to his own kitchen, 'He just sits and fusses, Bob, he's just like any ordinary old man. I don't think it was the journey really, you know, but I think it's realising he doesn't want to go away again. The sight of his books makes him very bad, but I don't like to get rid of them. Oh well — cheerio, boys, see you to-morrow.'

The lovers had slipped from their corner some time ago, the party in the saloon trooped out, and ten minutes before closing time Slater managed to persuade a solitary gentleman to play skittles with him. But he felt strangely unexultant at the easy win because the other men had gone.

JOHN HEARNE

Mrs. Scamper

The movements of Mrs. Scamper
flickered like quicksilver ;
her hard red wig
winked slyly at the sun.
I see her now,
pursuing goats in her garden,
a partisan, a warrior,
among her afternoon aurelias ;
chasing the round potent bodies
rump-bobbing through the gate ;
Like, I think,
the armies of Genghis Khan, with banners,
unwashed and hard on shaggy horses,
tumbling the sleek soldiers of Cathay
on the yellow plains behind the Wall.
In the green recesses
of society verandahs
the quick shuttle of her voice
dissected reputations and ate the pieces.
The trumpet scream of Mrs. Scamper
calling Mr. Scamper from meditation
(he was a Buddhist and believed in transmigration)

sounded across the valleys
and thundered on the hill tops,
rattling the cut-glass
on Mahogany dining tables.
And memory serves me,
like an ubiquitous waiter,
the echo of Mrs. Scamper
holding revel and delight,
snapping up the gossip
like a hungry turtle,
with an eye on her liquor,
in the garden at midnight.

MAIRI MacINNES

I see death . . .

I see death as a motor-car
dipping and rushing over the hills
far away in the windy sunshine.
I wait on the moorland road.
Sorrow as a single magpie alights on my left hand.
The crackling stream, the bunting on a thorn,
the pebble glint of the tar
mock the familiar stranger
whom death will dispossess — the sea calls
(scenting the wayside grass)
' Once created, I was forgotten.'
Nearer flies the car.

Who is the driver? No doubt he
is rich and has hired the moor for a season,
and threatening from the car
will harangue and cry
' Go! Go! Go! Don't you know this car?'
— as if one could own or hire a moor,
or stop a woman walking on it
by introducing death!

JAMES REED

Border Incident

Here are no maps. The men have gone away.
A world ago the ruined tower fell.
The hill hangs like a threat behind the day
Whose deeds dry memory is loth to tell.

The strife was worthless beyond reason's pitch.
Over the fillet of the rocky thigh
They came with eyes of blood, until the ditch
Grew dark between the river and the sky.

Bents whisper now in the forgotten places.
Mound, circle, pele, house adders in the sun ;
Through all the reluctant traveller retraces
His words. Here are no maps. The men have gone.

CHRIS BJERKNES

Steeple Jack

I. From Louisiana I came to enter the city,
I heard the jargon of the marsh again
the stretched claw of the wild laughter hawks
the rifle hunting out a four footed season.

I saw ox-eyed children
laugh like a hoarse crow does,
I saw the cotton mouth soft
like white flesh was.

I smelled the wild orange blossom
near the quick flesh, as sand. I ate the raw

berry. I saw the wild mangoes
spread soft and warm, as lovers were.

II. All my days with their arrogance, each
holding what part of me was,
I came as a steeple jack, poking the leather
winds, working about the boughs of the city.

The oak and cypress washing its cold hands
in my heart's thought, hope knocked out
of the sidewalks' stone,
keeping squawl mouth children fed.

III. We walk tight on the wind.
Even the gull slides down the humped-back
time. I am old, too old to carve the sun
from the rain; and though we as rasp tongued hawks
with their prey walk along the sleeping
waters of the quay, each wiping its bleeding beak
on the moon,

Where girls like pearl-eyed gulls rise
lean and laugh, we walk tight upon the time,
and the days fall like lilies upon the wind:
Though we grow tall, we perish.

PETER REDGROVE

The Flood

Was it a real silence that you broke
With your hair of lightning and your white feet,
Or my whole memory that you took
Filling the forestage of my mind

As an actor playing some great part
Swamps the beholder with his noise:
The eye forgets the minor hearts
That with their tears make up the play,

And make the main part what it is,
Without them, pared and meaningless.
And are they bad, as you tell me so?
The dimension of evil to your good?

I think you are the towering thundercloud
That broke that quietened tree so long ago,
Hurried the fawn to his dark mother's breast;
The crashing hand that, opened, drenched a world.

THE LITERARY SITUATION — II

by Martin Seymour-Smith

THE YOUNGEST generation of poets share a conviction that their poems should be clearly written ; that obscurity can never be a virtue. Emotive power is not enough — it may be misleading, and even positively anti-poetic. Very few serious-minded students of poetry would feel that this tendency was a bad thing in itself. There is now much more general agreement about poetry than there was in the twenties and thirties ; in those days you did not have to try to show that Dylan Thomas, for example, made sense if you admired him : he hit you, you went down. Some of the poets of the early twenties exhibitionised (as all poets at some time or another will) by means of deliberate obscurity and incomprehensible private references ; some of the poets of today exhibitionise by means of 'difficulty', 'wit', or out-of-the-way, but 'public', references. Poetically, then, our exhibitionists are more dishonest ; but critically, I suppose, they are more in the right. Critical theories, which originally arose from the need to name certain factors existent in literature, have usurped the function of creativity. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that the didactic criticism of the last forty years has done its work, has lost its force, and has therefore split up into various less useful, or even harmful, minutiae. The following poem by Dr. Donald Davie, *Homage to William Cowper*, offers an interesting illustration of the effect critical theory may have on poetic practice :

Mrs. Throckmorton's bull-finch sang a song
(Domesticate that comfortable bird)
But still the deer has wandered from the herd,
The bard was not articulate for long.

A pasticheur of late-Augustan styles,
I too have sung the sofa and the hare,
Made nightmare ride upon a private air
And hearths, extinguished, send a chill for miles.

This costive plan, this dense upholstery,
These mice and kittens, this constrictive rhyme,
These small Infernos of another time —
What's all this modish Hecuba to me?

Most poets let the morbid fancy roam.
The squalid rat broke through the finch's fence,
Which was a cage, and still was no defence :
For Horror starts, like Charity, at home.*

This poem is intended to be partly 'about' 'Horror'— the sort of 'Horror' which may have driven Cowper mad, and from which Dr. Davie implies he suffers. It is in many ways a very revealing poem, though perhaps not in the manner the poet intended. First, there is a detectable protest-note running

*Fantasy Poets No. 19. Fantasy Press. 9d.

through it, a sense of 'You ask me why I am such an academic poet, why I use such tight forms; you suggest *I* haven't got a morbid fancy — no! I have worse than that, I have such a "Horror" as must be controlled or would drive me, like Cowper, insane!' I don't think this comment is unfair on the poem; and indeed, there is no reason why such a protest should not be valid. But Dr. Davie tells us nothing at all about the nature of this 'Horror'. Even the various biographical references (which nearly everyone could spend two or three hours looking up) only give us information about Cowper's madness. But Dr. Davie is not Cowper. It is possible that for 'Horror' he would have liked to substitute 'feeling' or 'emotion': but 'Horror' with its capital 'H', its rhetorical and melodramatic effect, banging out at the end of the cage-like quatrains is easier. The poem appears to be a precise, even meticulous, statement; but in fact it has no insight into what seems to be its subject, 'Horror'; it is not really about this. The impulse behind the verse fails when the subject-matter wishes to be emotive. The 'neutral tone' that is 'nowadays preferred' has its yearnings, however; it wants to tell the harsh story behind the tidy exterior; but the story is a melodramatic one, a poor substitute for the logical clarity of a critical theory. Or is it simply the opposite end of the scale: the thereotician's idea of 'life-material'? But here I must be careful to point out that I am in no way suggesting that Dr. Davie knows nothing of 'life-material'. I do think, however, that I am justified in assuming from this poem, and some of his others, that he is not concerned with it in his poetic practice. He adroitly fixes the responsibility for all this on to the convenient madness of a gentle poet whose style it is to his advantage to admire, but he adds nothing to our understanding of even that madness. Poor Cowper! The sense of terror which Dr. Davie wants to strike out at us in the last line does not really exist in the impulse behind the poem, which is really one of academic protest. His non-emotive poetry would not feel impelled to make its frequent shrill emotive claims if the Doctor did not himself feel that something was missing; a number of his poems do seem to me to have this theme, and they have the same strange melodramatic quality. The trouble is that he comes to his subject-matter already armed with ready-made form-cages and those disciplinary instruments necessary for the mutation of cries of pain or love into neutral tones preferable to the donnish ear. We must take it that the 'Horror' is one of feeling itself; this does not, of course, imply a lack of feeling. It is, in a way, an explanation of the poem quoted above. I am by no means implying that Dr. Davie is insincere when I say that it is a melodramatic poem: it is melodramatic because it either won't or can't say enough about the nature of its subject. I suspect that it won't. The origin of this attitude is more likely to be found in a symptomatic neurosis than in any literary conviction. And if this neurosis, which may be said to provide the 'inner' material of Dr. Davie's poetry, wasn't symptomatic, one wouldn't take this trouble with it. In the final stanzas of *Eight Years After* he says, aiming at the same effect as in *Homage to William Cowper,*

> For fearsome issues, being squarely faced,
> Grow fearsomely familiar. To name
> Is to acknowledge, to acquire the taste
> Comes on the heels of honouring the claim.

'Let nothing human come outside my range'
Yet horrors named make exorcisms fail:
A thought once entertained is never strange,
And who forgets the face beyond the pale?

Although this poem is a deliberately ironic statement about something other than Dr. Davies's own verse, I think it has the additional function of self-reproach. In effectively and bitterly satirising an attitude towards the enormities inflicted by humanity on itself — specifically, I take it, those of the last war — he is also laying blame upon himself for his attitude towards emotion. The excusing ring of the last line defines the tone of the whole, tying together its two meanings. It seems to me to be a powerful poem; but can Dr. Davie go further within his present range? So far, his subject-matter is almost exclusively confined — although sometimes in subtle and obscure terms — to a definition or a defence of the *form it takes.* Sometimes this seems forced, as in *Homage to William Cowper,* but in others, as in *Eight Years After,* when it parallels the comment of a predominantly bitter or satirical nature, it has a certain power. In his best poems, this attitude reinforces and is reinforced by the 'external' theme.

But this is not enough. The direction of Dr. Davie's development suggests that he is continually on the look-out for satirical material to make this statement over and over again; and that he is constantly seeking a critico-academic excuse for postponing an attempt to write a poetry of wider range. The sort of poetry of which Dr. Davie is so frightened is not 'feeling caged in form', although it almost always finds its expression in one sort of form or another. But the form grows out of the complexity and delicacy of the emotion, and of the poet's attitude towards that emotion. Dr. Davie is right, I think, to have objections to Dylan Thomas; but one wonders if his bitterness is motivated by the fact that Thomas was an intentionally emotive poet. One doesn't have to be academic to protest that Thomas, as he grew older, and more and more important, over-simplified and therefore vulgarised the nature of his poetic feeling by the skilful and suggestive use of poetic rhetoric — brass bands, so to speak, being easier to conduct; and the kind of music they make being more popular while it lasts.

I may be being unfair to Dr. Davie: one should, in any case, reserve final judgment until his forthcoming book, *Brides of Reason,* is published by the Fantasy Press. What I have tried to show is the inevitable result of the academic direction' some poets seem now to be taking; and that their concern is anti-literary and not academic, in any right sense, at all. Dr. Davie is an obvious and extreme example; he is an academician *par excellence,* and he has great competence and ability. Such a critical attitude as his own could be healthily functional in poetry; when it seeks to dominate poetry, it isn't. I suspect that the need to elevate criticism over its subject-matter (surely absurd even on the face of it) has its roots in neurosis and not in poetry. It is the recognition of this which is necessary to a healthy poetry.

'The Whole World is our Hospital'

The Dreamers and the Sheaves, by I. R. Orton. (O.U.P.: Geoffrey Cumberlege. 8/6.)
Unlucky Jonah, by Philip Oakes. (Fine Art Department, University of Reading. 5/-.)
Descartes and the Animals, by Bernard Bergonzi. (Platform. 107 Palace Road, S.W.2. 5/-.)
Platform Poets, No. 1. E. L. Mayo. (Platform. 6d.)

I DO not think that the Wordsworth who wrote on the Poet's duty to mankind, hoping that the Poet should become the right-hand man of Science and welcome it as a 'dear and genuine inmate to the household of man,' would have been very satisfied with contemporary poetry. For he would not have been at all sure (if he had these four books as his only evidence) of what kind of a world these poets lived in, and would never have guessed that they existed under the shadow of the Triumph of Science. Few modern poets have taken up the challenge of the world around them. Most withdraw their horns and look the other way, so that their verse becomes mainly pretty instead of powerful, clever rather than compelling, and in certain cases just plain dull.

Miss Orton's first book, handsomely bound by the Oxford University Press, displays a cool reticence which is rarely ruffled, a nice sense of form, and a general conventionality of thought. Many of her poems are listless:

> Flower in the earth,
> Unsurfaced,
> Its leaves against the bloom,
> Petals unseen.

is typical of her clear and watery diction, rarely altered from poem to poem. And when we have read the whole book unstartled and unshaken, we find little to remember, though we have found nothing unpleasant. Miss Orton has played safe and consequently her score is not high. Her poem, 'The Classical Tragedy,' ends in a mood characteristic of most of the book: elusive, esoteric and often, unfortunately, without much meaning:

> The meaning cannot be displayed,
> And the chorus is a look.

It is only in the three final poems that Miss Orton is at her happiest, as 'The Unicorn' and the two poems on Dylan Thomas show simplicity and wisdom in clear and shining words.

Mr. Oakes displays a welcome maturity and an equally welcome ironic sense. Here again there is simplicity, but none of Miss Orton's devitalised monotony, for there is the rich source of folk legend and ballad to ballast and enrich his work ('The Holly Tree' and 'The Mediterranean Man' are examples). Observation and keen insight are apparent, but though at times he shows himself tersely aware that the world is no longer, for the poet, 'too much with us,' in 'Another Language,' where the lines

> The world is over
> And we need new words
> Before we dare speak of it again

reveal his awareness, he has not himself made any great attempts to 'find new words.' His obvious humanity might have been more valuable had he ranged about 'the household of man' a little more.

Mr. Mayo, we are informed, in one of those typical profiles on minor poets, 'does not think the two Williams — Shakespeare and Blake — are the two greatest poets who have ever lived.' What this has to do with his apparently favourite subjects of decomposition and death ('How late the assassins ply their trade tonight / the air is sweet with corpse-breath') is not made clear to the reader. He does not seem to have benefited much from 'enjoying reading them,' for his poems are written in a style that distorts, twists and wrenches the language to no apparent end. Reading these eleven poems has been a painful and unrewarding exercise.

Descartes and the Animals is the collected work of Mr. Bergonzi so far, and is well worth reading. Here is simplicity that is not simple-mindedness, and poetry that has an immediate impact and a hard, clean edge:

> And shall the simple words suffice
> For gestures of a complex grace?

He has, too, a ready and at times cruel smile (not many Janeites will be pleased with 'Anemones for Miss Austen') but also an equally ready seriousness that hides no trace of pomposity. He has taken care (as all good poets should, if they want their work published at the moment) over the shape and form of his poems, but not so much that it becomes obtrusive. Judging from these poems alone, he would seem to be happier as a writer of lyrics rather than longer work, for in 'This Autumn, This Music and This Room' he becomes diffuse and shadowy and even a little trite. Again, he has little of Mr. Oakes' subtlety, but he can write memorable lines; and his 'Question of Angles' has an obvious moral for contemporary poets:

> It serves in art. But life will not permit
> Such angles to be readily confused.
> To face a Thou you cannot look at It.

Paul Mitchell

D. H. L. v. U. S. A.

Studies in Classic American Literature, by D. H. Lawrence. (Doubleday Anchor Books, New York. 65c.)

LAWRENCE'S wisdom in these studies possesses a duality — his brilliant personal gnomicism carried over to pioneer American art-life. I can understand why such an attitude as this represents came to be: the book was begun in 1917 in England. In the overwrought sensibility of his ego, Lawrence contracted the malaise that shifted him over the physical globe. As it was, England was anathema to him. In due course he went to America, where he completed the studies and thus expiated himself.

Lawrence's revulsion was tantamount to a destined reaction of the Old World. It is plain for all to read. The American is 'a recreant European still.' He went to America for two reasons:

> 'To slough the old European consciousness completely.
> To grow a new skin underneath, a new form.'

Which is in process now, for you and I know how ugly it is. 'You can never have a new thing without breaking an old. Europe happens to be the old thing.'

And so, Benjamin Franklin represents the first practical Human idealist. He hated Europe. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur represents the first intellectual Natural idealist, who stepped into the Forest to meet the Red Man, which was in a sense an inverted refutation of his old Europe. Fenimore Cooper represents yet another idealist but one who cuts himself in two at the same time:

'His actual desire was to be: *Monsieur Fenimore Cooper, le grand écrivain américain.*

His innermost wish was to be: Natty Bumppo.'

Cooper stayed in France and imagined America from there! Edgar Allan Poe represents the sloughing of the old consciousness in his own neurotic disintegration. Nathaniel Hawthorne gives us America as the Female Force in *The Scarlet Letter.* Because woman is man's Fall, unwittingly she hates him, deceives him. Richard Henry Dana whose ideal was to *know* the sea, the unknowable. Dana, who represents Megalomaniac America: 'Love the great mother of the sea, the Magna Mater. And see how bitter it is. And see how you must fail to win her to your ideal: forever fail. Absolutely fail.' Dana, who wanted to be a deep-sea denizen! Herman Melville: 'Somehow, somewhere, love should be a fulfilment, and life should be a thing of bliss. That was his fixed ideal. Fata Morgana." Melville travelled for a long time and eventually reached his artistic *bête noir*: mother, wife, home. And in *Moby Dick,* in all those rather fearful, sententious symbols of the story, he gave the truth to the old lie. 'Melville knew. He knew his race was doomed. His white soul, doomed. His great white epoch, doomed. Himself, doomed. The idealist, doomed. The spirit, doomed . . . We are doomed, doomed. And the doom is in America. The doom of our white day.'

Lawrence almost believed it — almost, that is. As you will almost believe it until you read the final study. It is feasible because the symbols are legitimate, are part of the pattern of history. That is, until you come to the final study on the good, grey poet, Whitman.

Que diable allait-il faire sans cette galère?

Because Whitman says what Lawrence says in the didacticism of the Soul. Whitman, on the other hand, is too beautiful for Lawrence's moralism so what is left in the 'essential message' is a bit of both, though a bit more of Lawrence.

'It is not I who guide my soul to heaven. It is I who am guided by my own soul along the open road, where all men tread. Therefore, I must accept her deep motions of love, or hate, or compassion, or dislike, or indifference. And I must go where she takes me. For my feet and my lips and my body are my soul. It is I who must submit to her.

'This is Whitman's message of American democracy.'

Idealists!

I think Whitman's message was wasted on the desert ear.

In 1955 we have come to regard America's destiny as our own; therefore, we are able to recognise the importance of Lawrence's book and to accept him as the oracle he was.

Robert Cooper

SOME CONTRIBUTORS

ANTHONY THWAITE (Christ Church, Oxford) has published poems in all the leading weeklies and literary magazines, and broadcast in *Literary Opinion*. *The Dream* was broadcast in *First Reading*, and will appear in a volume, *Bracelet and Bone*, to be published in the spring.

LAWRENCE SPINGARN is the founder and editor of *The California Quarterly*. His verse publications include *The Lost River* (Heinemann), and poems in many magazines in England and the U.S.A.

PHILIP LARKIN has published two novels, *A Girl in Winter* and *Jill*, and a volume of poems, *The North Ship*. Born in Northern Ireland, he was at Oxford during and after the war, and at present lives and works in Belfast. The poem printed here has been broadcast.

MAIRI MacINNES went down from Oxford in 1948. She has published *Splinters* (poems, University of Reading, 1953) and is now working on a novel. She is married, and now lives in Germany.

JAMES REED is thirty-three and works as a schoolmaster. He is married with two children and is now working on a novel.

PETER REDGROVE has edited the Cambridge poetry magazine, *Delta*, and published poems and reviews in many magazines, notably the *Times Literary Supplement*.

PAUL MITCHELL (Lincoln College, Oxford) has written reviews for several Oxford magazines. He is now in his third year, reading English.

ROBERT COOPER is the editor of *Artisan*, and helped to found the Heron Press. He was born in Lancashire, and works in a hospital in Liverpool.

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